



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Testimony Regarding, **Senate Bill No. 793, *An Act Concerning STEAP Grants and the Conversion of Prime Farmland to Nonagricultural Use***, Before the Environment Committee, March 16th, 2009. Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, members of the Environment Committee, my name is F. Philip Prelli, Commissioner of Agriculture. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The Department of Agriculture believes this bill is not necessary, as the Department of Agriculture (DOAg) has a procedure in place with the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) that addresses this matter. Our process of working with DECD has changed, and now involves our review of all Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant projects that impact more than 25 acres of prime farmland earlier in the project's process.

Working with recommendations of the newly formed Farmland Preservation Advisory Board, the DOAg and DECD are requiring towns to have local conservation and/or agricultural commissions inventory the town's agricultural lands. Once these lands are inventoried, towns are to designate and prioritize agricultural preservation areas, creating an agricultural component to the town's plan of conservation and development. Through the funding stream generated by the "Community Investment Act" (PA 05-228), the DOAg is providing financial assistance to municipalities through agricultural viability grants to help in the training and establishment of local agricultural commissions with the purpose of planning for the town's agriculture endeavors.

The current procedure now allows the DOAg and DECD to work earlier in the project development process. This is a positive change in the safeguarding of the Connecticut's agricultural lands and encourages that all aspects of a project, its direct and indirect impacts, be reviewed as a whole, not piece by piece. Having more municipalities more recently recognize agriculture as an economic generator is a major accomplishment. All businesses need their tools, and available land is the raw material of agriculture.